



**February 7, 2023, Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's  
Committee on Children In Support of Raised Senate Bill No. 929  
"An Act Expanding school meal programs to provide free school meals to all students."**

Dear Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Vice Chair Kushner, Vice Chair Keitt, Senator Seminara, Representative Dauphinais, and members of the Committee on Children:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support Raised Senate Bill 929, "An Act Expanding school meal programs to provide free school meals to all students." My name is Edith Presley. As President of Stamford Cradle to Career, I am submitting testimony in support of short and long-term funding for no-cost meals for Connecticut students. A hungry child cannot learn, and no child should be made to feel less than because he/she cannot afford a meal. No-cost school meals allow students to learn and thrive.

Across Connecticut, thousands of children are facing food insecurity. We believe at our core that no child should go hungry and that every child deserves access to healthy, no-cost meals at school. Unfortunately, for far too many children in our state, this is not the reality.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, every child across the nation, which includes Connecticut, had access to no-cost breakfast and lunch. In Stamford Public School, we experienced a significant increase in school meal participation, signifying that countless students may have desperately required free meals pre-pandemic even though they did not qualify for free or reduced meal. Stamford Public Schools discovered that many more meals were served during the 2021-22 school year compared with 2018-19, the last school years not affected by COVID-19. Compared with that year, Stamford served 593,000 more meals during the 2021-22 school year, an increase of about 34%. The school system saw a 54% increase in school meals served from school year 2020-21 to 2021-22, the COVID impacted years.

In response to the Federal end of no-cost meals in June 2022, Stamford Cradle to Career launched the Food for Thought initiative to raise awareness of the benefits of no-cost meals throughout Stamford and of the importance of enrolling in HUSKY and SNAP. This initiative has seen tremendous success over the past six months, with a resulting increase in the number of children and families enrolling in these key programs and therefore having access to no-cost meals.

With SB 929, you have an opportunity to make an immediate change to ensure that no child goes hungry during school, regardless of where they live or what school they attend.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of SB 929 to expand school meal programs to provide free school meals to all students.

With gratitude,

Edith Presley

President, Stamford Cradle to Career